

Stark Floor Remarks On Medicare Legislation

Tuesday, 18 December 2007

This bill was designed by the Republicans to support their rich friends, the pharmaceutical industry, the for-profit insurance industry and to destroy Medicare as millions of American seniors have known it, to harm children, and to cast blame at illegal immigrants and working single parents."

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE, Wednesday, December 19, 2007

CONTACT: Yoni Cohen, Stark (202) 225-3202

STARK FLOOR REMARKS ON MEDICARE LEGISLATION

WASHINGTON,
D.C. – Representative Pete Stark (D-CA), Chairman of the Ways and Means Health Subcommittee, today delivered the following remarks on the House floor.

"I wish I could say that I was pleased to be here today to support important legislation, but you can't say that about this bill the Republicans have brought us.

"Last July, we sent to the Senate the CHAMP Act, a strong bill that preserved and improved both Medicare and the SCHIP program.

"The CHAMP Act extended health coverage to 10 million children nationwide. This bill doesn't even come close.

"This bill was designed by the Republicans to support their rich friends, the pharmaceutical industry, the for-profit insurance industry and to destroy Medicare as millions of American seniors have known it, to harm children, and to cast blame at illegal immigrants and working single parents. It shows the Republicans in their truest form, help the rich at the expense of the poor and deny government services to everyone and only help the profit industries who pay them so generously through their campaign contributions which will be useless because the public will realize that we don't need them anymore.

"The CHAMP Act provided Medicare benefits for all and it increased protections for low-income Medicare beneficiaries. It extended the physicians reimbursement above par for two years and protected rural providers for that same time period of time. The CHAMP Act also overrode provisions enacted by the former Republican Majority designed to end Medicare as an entitlement program.

"The CHAMP Act was paid for by reducing overpayments to the substandard private plans in Medicare & plans designed to privatize the program by Republicans.

"For this effort, House Members and our Staff are to be congratulated. They worked hard and took tough and reasoned positions.

"The Senate failed to act on our legislation and the irresponsible Republicans in the House of Representatives failed to help the children in this country, as is their want.

"What we have before us gives the lowest common denominator a bad name.

"The Senate has sent us a bill that extends otherwise expiring Medicare provisions by a mere six months, meaning that we'll be back here next summer, next spring, trying to fix a system which the Republicans consistently try to privatize and destroy, that is Medicare and SCHIP.

"For the next six months, the bill delays the 10% physician payment cut, prevents the therapy caps from going into effect, and protects rural providers by extending a host of particular provisions that would otherwise expire.

"There are some provisions that run longer. SCHIP will go for 15 months & moving it forward to a time when we will have a new President whom we hope will be willing to work with Congress to protect children's health and expand access to care. It also makes longer term reforms to Medicare payment policies for long term care hospitals and rehabilitation hospitals & two changes that are long overdue.

"What's wrong with this bill is what it fails to do.

"It flat out fails to address real improvements needed for Medicare beneficiaries — many of which we'd addressed in the CHAMP Act. It lacks increased protections for low-income beneficiaries. It lacks Medicare mental health parity. It lacks overdue improvements in preventive benefits and non-payment related reforms to the HMO program. It lacks limits on physician hospital ownership and self-referral and the list goes on.

"Adding insult to injury, this legislation also lets HMOs and the insurance industry off virtually scot-free, even though MedPAC, CBO, GAO, the Office of Inspector General and even the Administration's own actuaries confirm that we overpay these second-rate for-profit plans relative to the rest of Medicare. I would hope that those of you learned as I learned that if you don't like the food, don't eat it, but don't complain about it.

"We still have a strong bill pending in the Senate, the CHAMP Act. The Senate must act early in 2008 so that we can reach a better outcome for Medicare. We just can't keep subsidizing the for-profit providers and failing to serve our own children and seniors. We must proceed as best we can."